

Oral History of Ruth Branscomb
Interviewed: January 25, 2005
By Evelyn McClure and Rae Swanson for the WSCHS
Transcribed by Steve Stedman, WSCHS

Branscomb: Well, my great grand parents came to Sonoma County right after the big earthquake in 1908.

WSCHS: Where'd they come from?

Branscomb: They came from northern California. They had friends that had gone to Healdsburg and that was an old family that was up there. Their name was, oh...Farmer, no. You should have gotten me ten years ago.

WSCHS: What were your great grandparents' names?

Branscomb: Their name was Perkins

WSCHS: Perkins. What were their first names?

Branscomb: John, and my great grandmother was Lydia. And then she had five children. And, let's see: there was my grandmother, and one of the sisters—two of the sisters, all settled in Santa Rosa and they raised their families there.

My great grandmother was alive until I was nearly finished high school, which made it very interesting. Something that was interesting was the fact that I can remember them discussing the Civil War just like people might be discussing the current wars that we know about, and I assumed, when I was doing history in school, that the Civil War was just a long, long time ago and then I realized that it wasn't; that it was in their life time.

WSCHS: So, they were out here before the Civil War?

Branscomb: Oh, yes. No, no, no! A lot of their friends had settled in Santa Rosa, and of course there were not too many people in Santa Rosa at that time. A lot of them came because friends had come.

WSCHS: So they were originally from the Midwest?

Branscomb: Yes, they had come from Kansas.

WSCHS: What did your great grandfather do? What was his work?

Branscomb: Well, he had been in the Civil War. I think that he must have been sent to California, up into Modoc County; and I'm very sure that he must have been sent there to have something to do with the Indians and the reservation

WSCHS: So, he stayed in the military?

Branscomb: No. I think, I haven't any records of this, but I know that he and my great grandmother used to spend at least one month in the fall going to all of the different Indian reservations, and they would come clear down to Chico and around and back up into Modoc County. So, they stopped at each one of the reservations, and they knew all of the chiefs and all of the children.

WSCHS: Do you think that he was some kind of an Indian agent or...

Branscomb: Well, I don't know, and I hope to find out someday because I can't imagine them coming to California and going to that part of California unless there was a reason for them to have gone up there.

WSCHS: There couldn't have been too many people in Modoc County at that time.

Branscomb: No, there weren't, but I know my grandmother said that the Indians would come and the women would sit on her back porch and when she would open her back porch while the women were there and they wanted her to give them coffee. So, she would always serve them warm coffee in the morning, which made it interesting.

But, apparently, he had a great deal of time that he spent with them because they would bring him fruits and native things that they knew about that they thought he would like to know about. And one of the things that they would bring him were the wild plums, and he would save the best seeds from the best plums and plant them. And through his lifetime, he built up an orchard of very, very fine plums that were so superior to the original wild ones. And the property that he had they left to their son, and he left it to his daughter. And she and her husband didn't know what to do with all these plums, so they started making wine and jellies, and I guess that they shipped them all over the country, which was interesting. But the people that have the property now, I think they're making some kind of a plum cordial or something.

WSCHS: My, gosh, so they're still going!

Branscomb: They are! And they were enlarging the orchards because they were so unusual and had all these wonderful plums.

WSCHS: Sort of a Luther Burbank activity there.

Branscomb: Well, he had a huge truck garden up there, and he employed all of the young men that didn't have anything else to do. I think that the reason he was so successful

with that was the fact that everybody else who was up there was busy with proving up their land because an awful lot of that land was given to them by the government. So, anyway, that is why I think that he was so successful with his vegetable garden.

WSCHS: So, your family's in Santa Rosa at some point.

Branscomb: Yes, when I was a little girl they had a home out on Santa Rosa Avenue, and my great grandmother, her little home in the back was a carriage house, which is something; very few homes in Santa Rosa still have carriage houses, but I can remember that. And then, after my great grandfather died, they were far enough out that it wasn't convenient to get to town, so my grandmother sold that property and moved closer in to town so that they could walk into town and get their groceries.

And then I can remember how exciting it was when they got a bus. It cost five cents to ride the bus.

WSCHS: I guess in town they had different trolley systems, and railroads.

Branscomb: Yes, they had the streetcar that came from Sebastopol. That came through, several times a day, and it ran out as far as College Avenue and stopped. I know that usually the boys from Sebastopol, since that was where the depot was, they would ride the cars and sell papers on them; and they didn't have to pay anything to ride if they would switch the seats so that the back—they had reversible backs.

But the trains, you know, there in Sebastopol. Oh, I can remember we used to come to Sebastopol on the train and we would go from there on out to the river. And there was a depot at Trenton, and I don't think there's anything in Trenton left except a Grange Hall or something.

WSCHS: Yeah, the Druids' Hall is still there.

Branscomb: And you said River Road was the bed for the train?

WSCHS: I think that's right.

Branscomb: But we used to come in the summer time and camp at the river. But it was a very deep, and very cold, and very swift river when I was a little girl.

WSCHS: In the summer?

Branscomb: Yeah, in summer.

WSCHS: Was it a casual camping, or was it...

Branscomb: It was very casual, because we would go to Mirabel and my grandmother, she just loved to camp out, and so do I; but anyway, she had her rope and she tied it to the different redwood trees.

And then of course, soon after the Second World War(later amended to First,sic.), everybody bought blankets—Army blankets—and those were thrown over the ropes, and they would put the clothespins in them so that they wouldn't blow away; and then we had tent cots. Now, that... You can't much more casual than that.

WSCHS: You had open air--open stars...

Branscomb: Open air! And she had our stove. And I think that she would always have something that she could bring burlap, so she could cover—a box or something—and put the water on top, and then the burlap would stay damp.

WSCHS: So, you no refrigeration...

Branscomb: We had eggs and bacon and all sorts of things always on hand.

Off mike interjection: You said after the Second World War, but you meant the First.

Branscomb: The First, right.

WSCHS: Were there a lot of people out there camping in the summertime? This would be in the Twenties, then...

Branscomb: Yeah. It seemed to me like there were people—probably the whole area was full of these funny little makeshift camp areas.

WSCHS: When did the big bands start playing at Mirabel?

Branscomb: I used to come out there and dance in the—I think it was the Thirties and they came. Doctor Hamlin owned, what's the name? Rio Nido. And he had all the big bands there during the summertime. (garbeled off mike interjection) Not this Doctor Hamlin, his father. And that went on until the Second World War, and then, of course, people didn't have the gasoline to come there and all.

But people would come up here and spend the summer and that's when a lot of the old homes along the river were built. People just came and lived in them in the summertime.

WSCHS: Do you remember any of the bands that played?

Branscomb: Oh, I could probably figure it out if I...

WSCHS: Were they more local people or were they national or...

Branscomb: Oh, no. They were all the big bands because later on I can remember dancing to them at the Palace Hotel and places like that in San Francisco. No, that was before—of course, there was radio—but there was not the selection. But it was really something, and they were good!

I don't know how many places along the river had the big bands, but I remember going there many times to dance.

WSCHS: That would be really neat, to have a really good band! But that was the sort of thing you did in the 40's! We certainly danced a lot.

So, you were growing up in Santa Rosa. Where did you go to school?

Branscomb: Well, the first place that I went to school was little Burbank School. It was across the street from what is now Julliard Park. The Julliard garden went all the way back to that street. I can remember Mr. Julliard, after the youngsters would go home from school, would go out with his cane that had a bale on it and he would pick up all the gum wrappers and stuff that had been dropped by the way.

Then we moved over to 3rd and Pierce and I went first to a school that was on 4th Street where the park is now, near the school—it used to be Fremont School, or something, I don't know what it is now...

WSCHS: On Mendocino?

Branscomb: No, it was on 4th and...

WSCHS: Doyle? Is that Doyle Park?

Branscomb: I don't know what they call it now. There was a huge, great big wooden building there, and there was no inside plumbing, so there was a very elegant outhouse. I always remember that because they had these huge, great big tin sinks that were just enormous. And they were continuous and they had faucets that dripped all the time; and you could wash your hands and they had nothing to turn off and on—it was just a continuous flow.

WSCHS: How many students were in the school?

Branscomb: Oh, I have no idea, probably fifty or something. It was not just a grammar school. The area that I was in school in was different from the big building. I think that—in that last book about Santa Rosa, that you gave me for Christmas—it shows the building, but it had been built onto by the time that I was there.

And they had these elegant swings! I don't know how high they were, but to me they seemed like they just went up several stories. I used to try and swing to see if I could be high enough to be level with the bar!

Anyway, I went there and then they had build this new Fremont School which is now, what is it, the middle school or something—the one that's there on College and North. They built that, and I went to school there and then we moved to Lake County from Santa Rosa.

WSCHS: Now, was it in Santa Rosa that you met Luther Burbank?

Branscomb: Yes, because my grandmother lived across the street, there where the park is now...

WSCHS: Julliard?

Branscomb: Yes, Julliard. She lived just two or three houses north of that, and so Burbank had his garden right there on the corner. They've completely changed all that area now, you can walk all through it. But when I was little there was a picket fence all around and I used to hang on the picket fence and watch him while he would pollinate and cover up the plants with cheesecloth. And, like I've said many times, I never—in all the time I knew him—ever knew him not to have a suit on. I think you'll see in most every picture, that he has a suit on; even out there working in the garden, he had a vest and a very formal suit. Then he had a little house that was where he kept his seeds. It probably originally had been what you might call a tool shed, those were something that we used to have before we had garages; a little house where we put all of the garden tools.

WSCHS: It wasn't at the green house? A glass-covered sort of thing...

Branscomb: No. That was there. It was the same. The one that's there is the original.

Something that's very interesting is that he was perfecting a cactus that didn't have thorns.

WSCHS: Spineless, yeah...

Branscomb: And you know the neighbors were so jealous of him and what he was doing that they said that he didn't really develop a spineless cactus; that they had seen him out at night picking the spines off the plant. Isn't that terrible!! People are so... They just don't want...

WSCHS: When he got really famous, they were probably very jealous!

Branscomb: But most of the things he was developing there were flowers. His trees he was developing out here in Sebastopol.

My father used to buy farms, and fix them up, and sell them. And, of course he bought a lot of stock from Burbank. I can remember going out there many times, and getting to taste the fruit. He had the thornless berry, and he wanted my father to plant a commercial planting of those, and my father gave me a handful of the berries to eat and to see if I liked them. I spat them out and he said, "What's the matter?" and I said, "They taste like perfume." That was the end...(General laughter.)

Kathy has some of those thornless berries in her garden.

WSCHS: They still have them. They have them at the Burbank Experiment Farm. I think the propagate them.

Kathy: They were here when we bought this old house.

WSCHS: Right here?

Kathy: They're very prolific.

WSCHS: Do they taste like perfume?

Kathy: They have a very strong... Not as good as the wild blueberries.

Branscomb: They just don't taste like berries.

Kathy: They don't taste the same as the wild blueberries.

WSCHS: Are they sweet?

Kathy: Yes, they are sweet; but I think the thing is that they are sweet and neutral where the wild berries are sweet and tart. You need that tart to make it a real berry taste.

Isn't Burbank the one you planted the tree with?

Branscomb: Oh, yes. On Arbor Day. There's a Chinese Magnolia that is there at the new Burbank School, and I think that's the one I helped Burbank plant on Arbor Day one year. He also planted trees when I was going to the Fremont school on the other side of town. I don't know what happened to those trees. It was quite the thing for him to come to the different schools and plant trees on Arbor Day.

WSCHS: Was it his birthday at that time? I think they changed the date of the day.

Branscomb: Well, I don't think there was an Arbor Day, except in Santa Rosa. Didn't it originate here?

WSCHS: I can't remember the history of it.

Branscomb: But then I also remember the Rose Festival. It was quite interesting, and someplace I'll get you a picture of one of the floats; and from the information on the picture, it's one of my great-aunt's floats. The Santa Rosa parade was really an elegant thing in the early days. They would have Maypoles there in front of the old courthouse and people used to dance Maypoles after the parade.

WSCHS: What was your family name?

Branscomb: My name was Godfried.

WSCHS: Godfried? So your mother and father were...

Branscomb: My father was born in Wales; but my mother was one of the daughters of the Perkins family. So, of course she came with them. And, after the earthquake, there was so much property here in Sonoma County because many of the people who had come here from the east went home, so there were all of these beautiful homes and all of this acreage that was just left. So it was too good to not just come and move into this area.

WSCHS: That was something. Did people just abandon their property, or did they sell it?

Branscomb: The home that my grandmother bought was a beautiful big home on Santa Rosa Avenue. The property was a half a block on Santa Rosa Avenue and it went back almost to the street behind, so it was almost half a block. She got it completely furnished. The only thing that the people took was their clothing. There was everything from the silverware to the pillows and ...

WSCHS: Sounds like they were frightened?

Branscomb: Yes, they were frightened. Santa Rosa really did get a lot of shaking...

WSCHS: Devastation...

Branscomb: I think it was something that people from the east had never experienced. But my grandmother told me about the storms that they used to have in the Midwest with the twisters; and she said that she'd take the earthquakes any time. So that...

WSCHS: Yeah, they happen a little more regularly than earthquakes do out here.

Rae: You know the worst earthquake that ever happened in the United States happened south of St. Louis.

Evelyn: Yeah, the New Madrid one in Missouri...

Kathy: Right, the Madrid one. You must be from Missouri...

Evelyn: Wisconsin.

General discussion: How extreme were they... Nine something... Oh, my goodness... What year was that? Oh... 1890's? The reason it's not well known is there was virtually nothing there. There's hardly anything in New Madrid now and there wasn't much going on then.

WSCHS: So, people don't know about it, or remember it.

Well, Ruth, once you finished grade school, where did you go to high school?

Branscomb: I went to high school in Lakeport.

WSCHS: So you were in Lake County at that time.

Branscomb: Yeah. The odd thing is that, after I was going, my mother wanted to have my picture taken and my father was very reluctant to make a date to take me to the photographer. So, a man came to the house and, if you subscribed to the local paper, you could get a free picture—a family picture.

In that paper was the ad for a big ranch up in Lake County, and my father decided that he had to go up and take a look at it. So that was how we happened to get to Lake County. And, I got my picture taken!

That was in the day before people had cameras in their back pocket. You had to go to a studio.

WSCHS: Well, you obviously got married. How did you meet your husband?

Branscomb: Well, my mother decided, when I was a senior in high school, that I needed to get out of the country. I think she was afraid that I might find one of the local boys that was of interest. So I went to Berkeley for my senior year in high school, and friends introduced me to the children's father. So I graduated from high school and two weeks later I got married when he graduated from the University of California...

WSCHS: So he was much older then...

Branscomb: Six years...

WSCHS: So then you spent time in Berkeley? Did you stay in Berkeley?

Branscomb: Well, for quite a few years, but then he was a physicist and he was employed by the Department of Agriculture, by the Forestry Department and we were sent all over. We went to southern California; we went to northern California; we went to Washington.

Then, when the Second World War came along, he was asked to work on the ships doing what they called degaussing—what is it, the magnets; and he worked at that until the war was over. About that time, our marriage was over, too.

(Casual conversation as Kathy leaves.)

Rae: I have a question. I was so impressed with the bust of Burbank that you did! It was an incredible piece! What inspired that?

Branscomb: Well, I had always loved to play with clay. I was supposed to have gone to art school, after I got married. That was one of the things that our mothers had decided, that if I would marry Pete, that then I would go to art school, but I got pregnant, so...that was sort of the end of that.

But, after I quit running the gallery, I had to have something to do so I thought, you know, I'd just get some clay. And then I didn't know what to do with the clay, so I thought I'll just see if I can make a bust. The only book that I had that had a picture that I related to was a portrait of Burbank. So, I started, and I kept working and working on it. Finally I thought it was a rather good likeness and I said to my son, "You know, I think I'll make something around it, and I'll make a birdbath out of it."

And he said, "I don't know. Why don't you do some fruit?"

So I thought well, that's fine so I started making all the fruit that I remembered he had had. So, I had all of this and when I got it finished I decided that I'd take it in and find out what it would cost to have it bronzed, because the family felt that I should have it bronzed and enter it in the fair. So the man gave me a quote on it and said it was really one of the nicest things he'd ever seen brought to the foundry, but I had to fill in around all of the nuts and apples and everything because they couldn't make a mold of it without it costing a fortune.

So I decided that as long as I had this information and was over in Sebastopol, that I'd drive out to Freestone and show some friends of mine what I'd been doing with my spare time. When I opened up the back of the van, some of the nuts had fallen off and I thought, well, I'll take care of that when I get home. So that was fine and when I came through Occidental and across and got back up here and opened the back of the van to take Luther out, not only the nuts had disappeared, but a lot of the other things had also fallen off and when I found the last of the nuts they were under my feet. So, I brought

Luther up here and then I started trying to find all of the decorations. As I added everything to it, it wasn't exactly the same as it had been, but at least there were not these blank spots underneath or behind the different fruits.

The man at the foundry had told me to let it dry before I brought it back to him. You know, everybody has a vocabulary that means certain things. To me, dry meant dry. So I thought well, I'll just not to cover it up with a damp towel, I'll just leave it out and let it dry. So, two or three days later, I thought I'd better go out and see how Luther's doing, and see if it's dry enough to take it to the foundry.

Well, his head had fallen forward, and several other things had happened to him. The fruit was all in place, but...

WSCHS: Great!

Branscomb: So I said, "That's it!" I'm not going to have anything to do with it, 'cuz it's ruined. And the family said, "Well, look, we want you to have it for the fair so go ahead a fix it up the best you can." So, he's not the Luther Burbank as he once was. It won second prize, so I guess that's all right.

Rae: You wouldn't know it. You wouldn't know he'd been through such tribulations!

Evelyn: What made you do that?

Branscomb: I don't know...

Evelyn: The bronze foundry? It was in Sebastopol.

Branscomb: I don't know. I have a griffin around here someplace that probably says. It's probably ten or twelve years ago.

So, anyway, after the little Nicholas Green had died I thought well, as long as Luther had won a second prize at the fair that I would call up Mr. Green and ask him if he would permit me to try to do something of Nicholas. So, he came and looked at Luther and he said that he thought that that would be fine. The family brought me several pictures, but I didn't have the last picture that they had taken which was not sent to them until long after; because the people that had taken the film from the folks after they were there at the hospital did not get it developed and over to them until after I'd started in and was almost finished with it.

Of course, you just need a lot of measurements and so forth to do it properly. So, I was working from pictures from when he had his first birthday parties up until the last

pictures they had of him, but he couldn't have been more than 10 or 12 years old—about ten years old or something like that. There were none of them that were full face or full profile, so this is what I got. But when Mr. Green saw it, the tears rolled down his cheeks and he was quite pleased.

WSCHS: You've never taken classes at all?

Branscomb: Well, I did, but the teacher I took sculpting from was not too long ago. I didn't have too much luck there because she wanted you to do things that were like modern things, where they were just like abstractions. I did this gentleman, and when she fired it something in the kiln blew up so he didn't come out as well as he might have.

You know, I should be doing it, but my get up and go left some years ago. But I think that probably I should try again.

WSCHS: So, you knew Nicholas?

Branscomb: He had been to the gallery when his mother was having a lot of their pictures reframed for the house there in Bodega Harbor. He took care of his little sister when all of this business was going on. He kept her entertained, and you couldn't believe what he could think of. He sat her in a chair and then he performed for her.

You know, when I was working on this once in a while I'd start to cry because he made such an impression on me because I had never seen a child do that before. He was really exceptional. Of course, his father—if you read the book that his father wrote—you begin to understand that it wasn't just a father's fondness for a child. He realized that Nicholas was special; because you know there are children that have a radiance to them: an ability to really just be exceptionally charming.

WSCHS: How long did you have the gallery? Do you still have the gallery?

Branscomb: Oh, we still own the building, but it's turned into a bed and breakfast by my grandson—Kathy's son—and my son's son works with him. I don't have anything to do now except take care of myself. Kathy came over today because I, for the last couple of days, hadn't felt very well. My blood pressure now is almost through the roof, so that's why Kathy was sitting here. No one can have a daughter-in-law that can compare with her.

When I first started having problems with my heart, she fixed a monitor in my room and when my heart would start fibrillating I just pressed the button and she would

be up here instantly. I decided that wasn't fair to her so then I put in a pacemaker, but it's not working too well. It's swollen up and it hurts all the time. So, they're going to take me in to the doctor and we've been discussing what to do about whether to take it out or what. Of course, if they take it out I'm gone!

Rae: Could it just be an infection around it?

Branscomb: No. There's no fever. I don't run a temperature. But, anyways, I'll go in in a couple of days, as soon as they can see me, and find out what they're going to do about it.

The man who tests it, every six months, says the battery will last another two years, but I don't think that I can put up with it for two more years. But I think that there's a lot to these things that are electronic, that are battery powered; that they still have a lot to learn about.

Evelyn: Oh, the technology's moving so fast.

Branscomb: So, we'll find out what it is, but I think it's got a short circuit in there of some kind.

Well, I don't know I have been very helpful in giving you information, but when I know what it is that you're interested in, as I think of something, why I can write down.

My family wants me to write so they just brought in my desk that goes with my furniture. You know I had that reception at the inn, and so they brought me a big desk in here and I'll get it set up pretty soon. I told you there was some rearranging I wanted to do, so that's it. We had to put the desk in my bedroom, but that's the only way they could get it in was through the French doors over there.

With my working with clay, I thought that I could work out there on the porch. But, in the summertime, when it gets pleasant, I get out there and the first thing you know it gets too hot. If I wait until in the evening, then the mosquitoes are out. But I have an idea that a lot of this is just procrastination.

WSCHS: Well, you would know! Did it give you any pleasure to work with the clay?

Branscomb: Oh, I think that it's probably the easiest thing that I ever did. I'm ashamed with myself that I don't do it all the time, but I stopped when I did this. My family thought that working with the plastic clay might have had something to do with my heart problem. Yet, they say that it doesn't and they have some new clay out now that's not

supposed to have any chemicals in it. So, anyway, I think that I'll try that. I've got all kinds of wet clay out there. But, like I say, it's just isn't sort of conducive and I don't dare bring it in here because I'd ruin the floors.

WSCHS: Hang the mess! I say, "Hang the mess!! Throw that canvas down! Clean the boards!"

Branscomb: The ants got in here, and I sprayed the ants and spoiled that part of the floor. I think they're going to have somebody come in and refinish the floor.

And, refinish the painting. You see, we started redecorating a year ago, and then we decided we wouldn't go any further with that until we figured where the leak's coming from. So, we've got that leak, and this leak, and then this.

I must tell you about this cottage. This is the old tank house; the center here went up with the tank above. When they got water, apparently, they piped into this area, they took the top off the tank house and they built workshops or something on both sides. Then Kathy came up with the idea that I should be over here with them, so they had to get permission to turn this into a cottage. They were told that they could raise the shell and build inside of it, and put a proper foundation; but they couldn't tear it down. So, this little unit, which is just all I need, cost them more than if they had bulldozed it down and built from scratch. They had to prop the whole thing up, and then after they had built this cottage, then they dropped it down on the foundation that they put in. But, it really is wonderful!

You see, I had been...The upper part of the building over at Bodega Bay was built as a residence, when the Dunleavy's built the building, so I was very comfortable there. But, if I went out at night and came back I just didn't feel comfortable about going back into that building even though there were alarms. I figured that, if I was there at night by myself and the alarms went off, it would scare me to death.

WSCHS: You'd definitely have a heart attack!

Branscomb: So, anyway, they fixed this up and moved me over here; and it's wonderful because when my laundry's ready to go I just put it by the door and they take it down to the laundry for me. I really feel like an awful nuisance, but they don't seem to mind. Just like when Kathy found out that I didn't feel well today, she decided to come up and be the hostess.

Now, my son is an attorney and they have an office building in Santa Rosa. They were both driving in every day, but they decided, with all the electronic equipment that they have, they could move it all out here to the house; and they still have the use of their building in Santa Rosa if they need to see somebody there.

So, anyway, they go in for the mail every day. Somebody goes, makes one trip in, but that different from two cars going in every day. Kathy does all of the paperwork, and all of the researching, and everything. She's been doing it for many years. I told her she really ought to take the bar exam and then she could get her license; and she said she really didn't have time, but, if necessary, at some time then she could. They've just kept everything rather private. You know, there's a lot of problems with hired help, although the secretary that they have now drives out here every day. She says it only takes her five minutes more to drive here than it took to drive from where she lives to where their office was in Santa Rosa.

Then they can sit here and watch the squirrels in the trees; and watch the birds and everything.

WSCHS_Did you do...

Branscomb: Yes, I designed clothes when I was young. I started out—my grandmother would make doll clothes for me—so I started out making doll clothes. When I found out it was too laborious to sew with a needle and thread, when my mother would go to town on business, I decided to get to the sewing machine and sew. Then, when I'd hear her coming, I would close the sewing machine up and hide everything. But one day I ran the needle through my finger, so, when she came home, my brother told her that I had a bad finger and she said, "What were you doing?" (Side A of tape runs out at this point.)

Side B: The conversation resumes at another point.

WSCHS:... That's okay, as long as you got the mortgage paid.

Branscomb: That was the problem. Mother had borrowed against, to do something else, and then, when the farm was not productive... I was very fortunate in the fact that my mother was a shopper. She would buy patterns and all this fabulous fabric because in Santa Rosa both The White House and Rosenberg's loved to see my mother coming.

She was very elegant, and in those days when you went downtown you wore gloves, a hat, and everything. I can remember us going in and in those days the owner

met you at the door, and greeted you and asked about the family, and then they would escort you to the department for whatever it was that you wanted to buy.

At The White House, the yardage department was right inside the front door on the left, and there were all these little stools and you sat down and they draped the fabric for you to look at. It was elegant. Then they would always have specials for somebody that was really special, and those came out from hiding. So, anyway, my mother would buy whether she needed it or not.

So, there was this huge chest of drawers and it was full of fabric. There was enough fabric in there for me to make clothes until I graduated from high school. Not only that, every Saturday I would make an outfit and I would take it to town to the dress shop and they would sell it, and I would buy my shoes with the money that I made. So, my new shoes all came from the dresses that I had made and sold in town, but nobody knew who was making those clothes that were sold in town.

But one time—everybody came to our house, the young people all came to our house on Saturday night, because there was no place else to go, and my mother would let them roll up the rugs, and we danced and we had lots of fun—I had made this one dress and I'd taken it to town and it had been there for about three weeks and I decided that that was too long, so I went in and picked it up. That night I wore it to the party that we were having in the house and one girl said, "Oh, I might have known you would get it. I was talking to my father and he told me that I could have it, and I went down to get it, and it was gone!" I didn't tell her that I made it, but I told her, "Oh, that's all right. If you like it, I can make something for myself." So, I took it off, and she took it home.

Mrs. Finley used to have dances in Santa Rosa at the Press Democrat Hall, most of the second floor of the building that is there now was a big, beautiful dance floor—I don't know whether it was a conference room or what. She would have an orchestra, and we had dance cards, and the fathers were there and they would see that our dance cards were full, and they always wanted to know if they could save one of the dances for themselves. It was very elegant, and we had lots of fun.

There were several other homes that had orchestras in the homes, and even though I lived up in Lake County, with my grandmother and great-grandmother living here, we

used to drive down on the weekends. So, I had as much social activity down here as anybody could have expected.

Fortunately I was always included, but Ruth Pierson was my first girlfriend. We got acquainted throwing rocks at each other when we moved in next door to their house. There was a driveway that divided the property and my father had some very special little rocks put in the driveway, and, of course, they were just good to pick up a handful of and...

Something else that Mrs. Finlwy was telling me, after I came back, a few years before she died I used to take she and Miss Willsey out to lunch every so many times a month. She said, "You know, Ruth, you were quite a business person when you were little. I never could understand what happened to my apples." They owned a big apple orchard out in Sebastopol. Mr. Finley would drive Rosie and I out there and we would load the car up with apples and they'd have them in their garage. Ruth and I decided we needed some money so we put apples in a bucket, as much as the two of us could carry, And we went around the neighborhood selling apples for ten cents a bucket.

One time somebody gave Ruth twenty-five cents and we couldn't figure out what to do—we hadn't started school yet, of course we didn't go to school as early as they do now, and we were bored to death. We finally decided that with that much money we should go and buy some lollipops. There was a little Mom and Pop store not far from where we lived and we went in and bought 25 lollipops. Then we had to decide where to eat them. We knew we didn't dare go to our homes because Mrs. Finley always said that I should know better—she was quite a psychology person—and she would say to me, "Now, Ruth, you just have to not do that, because you know better, because I have to have you see that Ruth doesn't get into trouble. So, you are responsible." So, anyway, we'd found that we could get underneath one of the neighbor's back stairs—in those days, the houses were built up. We crawled in underneath this back stairway and started eating lollipops. At first, we were quite selective. The more we ate, the more selective we became, until finally we decided they didn't taste good anymore. I don't know what ever happened to the rest of those lollipops, but I think that was the last time I ever ate a lollipop.

WSCHS: Where did the Finleys live?

Branscomb: At that time, they were living on College Avenue. Their house was where the bicycle shop is now. Their house was on the corner and ours was next. It was such a lovely street, but the street was not wide and there were all these huge trees all down the street. In fact, it seemed to me like they almost touched.

We could roller skate, and we could... You know, when we'd get dressed and shoot out of the house, we weren't expected back until it was time to eat again. Nobody worried! Everybody was...

WSCHS: You found things to occupy yourself.

Branscomb: I can remember, because my father was into agriculture and buying these farms and such, I think that the banks asked him to take over properties and fix them up, and then at the end of the year, they would sell them. So, my mother got to fixing the houses and she would take care of all of the grounds outside, and the trees and so forth. Then, when they sold them, they would move back into Santa Rosa. But, after one move we had made, the Finleys had moved over to McDonald Avenue and Mother wanted to move to McDonald Avenue and Dad said he wouldn't live over there because all the hearses went by there on their way to the cemetery.

So, he bought her a house on the corner of Pierce and Third and that was a very lovely neighborhood at that time. Across the street from us was Frank Doyle and on the corner of Fourth and Pierce was the Doyle home, a gorgeous home. Next to that was Jim Grace's house, a great big colonial house. It was a beautiful little town.

What I was going to tell you is, the house now is not like it was when I was little because the people that bought the house from us put a cottage in behind it facing Pierce Street. When we owned it, the house went clear back to the alley. So, all along that street, all the way down to Second, I think it was, were big walnut trees. The street wasn't paved so there were very few cars going, so we kids would play out on Third Street and up on First Street.

One afternoon, my father, my brother and his boy friends were playing football out on Pierce Street. One of the local doctors lived in Third Street just past us, and he came onto Pierce Street and was going to turn right and the boys kept right on playing football. So, at the dinner table, the phone rang and Mother answered and she said that

she was sorry and that she would speak to the parties. As soon as she came back to the table she said, "That was Dr. Herlow and he thought that you should quit playing ball and let the car have the right of way." And Dad said he didn't know why the doctor minded waiting until they'd finished changing sides, or whatever it was. That's how primitive the area was at that time.

Then, of course, the Imwalle's came by with their wagon covered with vegetables and you went out and chose your vegetables for dinner or for the next day. It seemed to me that they were always stopping by. There were certain houses. And the iceman came and the milkman came. We always chased the iceman because we wanted ice.

WSCHS: Did your mother set a table every night?

Branscomb: Definitely! And also at lunch time because when I went to...(Phone call interrupts narrative.)

WSCHS: Your mother sounds like she was pretty remarkable.

Branscomb: My mother enjoyed ill health until the age she died. She was eighty-three years old. She always knew that there was something that the doctors just couldn't find. So, I don't remember her ever having a job, or ever wanting one. She didn't sew. She cut out, but she never sewed. So, a lot of the fabric that I designed and made my clothes out of—the basis of my design came from all this stuff she'd cut out.

Something that was funny was that one time there was something special coming up and some way or the other I had been given five dollars. So, I told Mother that I wanted to get some material in town. When we went in, I think I was a freshman in high school or something, they had just gotten a bolt of black crepe. I decided that I had white linen and I would make a collar and cuffs and so forth, and I would the black crepe and make this very stunning outfit. My mother would sometimes help me, and since I was cutting into this material, I think it cost seventy-five cents a yard, we decided, because I didn't actually know what I was going to do with it, that we would tear off one piece for the sleeves, and one for the skirt and then one piece for the blouse or the jacket. So, anyway, the design started going together and I had everything ready to do the skirt and when I held the skirt up, the skirt was apparently the piece was supposed to have been for the sleeves, so I couldn't imagine what I was going to do. So, Mother said, "Well, we'll just put a top on it." I forget what you call it. So, we cut the piece and we put a top on it

and it worked out very well, except that the bottom of the jacket didn't come quite together so you could see where this was pieced, but since it was all black, it didn't make much difference. I wore it, and it was quite a success.

I went to San Francisco to visit some of the family. My mother's oldest brother was my adored relative, and he thought that I was a nice little girl. His daughter—he was a great big six foot something man and his wife was almost as tall, so, of course, the children were quite large—Connie, when she was eleven years old she was taller than I was, and they never could find anything that they really liked on Connie because she was too young for mature clothes and she was too big for little girl clothes. So, she was invited to a party and when I left their house I forgot my black suit. So, they put Connie in it and she went off to the party and apparently she was quite a success, and, of course there wasn't a seam that wasn't stretched, but Warner said that was the best outfit she'd ever had on and can we keep it until I can have the outfit copied for her. So, they went to The City of Paris and bought this gorgeous material. I don't know, he paid more a yard than I paid for everything. They found a French seamstress that told him that she would make it for \$65, and he said, "I want it copied exactly. Just make it a little bit bigger so it will be comfortable on Connie." So, they sent the dress back and when we went to San Francisco to visit Warner got the dress out to show us how wonderful it was that this woman had copied the dress and she cut the top of the skirt off just exactly like we had. We never told.

Evelyn: That was a yolk, when you add that...

Branscomb: A yolk You know it really is terrible. When you get older, you know what you want to say but it just doesn't happen.

I was eighty-eight the first day of January.

WSCHS: Well, life must have been good to you. You are still a beautiful woman.

Branscomb: Oh, my goodness. That's very kind of you to say.

WSCHS: No, it's not kind, it's... Well, it is kind, BUT it's true!

Branscomb: Well, I don't know that I've told you anything that's really interesting about the Sebastopol area.

WSCHS: Well, it's neat, growing up in Sonoma County and your experiences.

It was your artwork that captivated me at first.

Branscomb: I was showing my sons. This is my son's artwork. The piece that was to go up there didn't have a hook on it, so when we moved it didn't hang right. These pictures he took in France when he was in the service. They must be thirty-five years old now.

WSCHS: It's something that you could print them up so big. They still look sharp.

Branscomb: He had a man over in Santa Rosa blow them up from just little tiny pictures. It's amazing how many people that come in... These are copies, he has more of these that are over in the inn. He brought these over here and hung them up because he didn't want anything to happen to them. They've got a house full of originals down there. They sort of brought these up to keep them out of the way.

I had a big Chinese shawl, you know those big pure silk shawls. You know those gorgeous... They were Spanish shawls, but they were embroidered in China and somebody had given me one years ago. When I bought this furniture, I had the shawl framed. They had to send to New York to have the frame made that I wanted. When it came back, they did a beautiful job of framing it and I hung it above this. When I was fixing up the cottage and I brought all this over from the gallery, I said, "The shawl needs to go up there." And Ed said, "I don't think we can let you have it. We've got it hung in our house and it's covering up a big hole in the wall."

So, I made the comment to Kathy when she came over today, "You know what originally went over there." But I said I like this because Ed has such a sense of humor and he's always doing fun things.

WSCHS: Do you just have the one son?

Branscomb: One son and a daughter.

WSCHS: ...and a daughter. Is she here?

Branscomb: She lives in San Francisco. Ed sort of decided that he and Kathy were going to adopt me, which was very nice. I keep thinking I'm an awful nuisance, but there isn't an afternoon when Ed doesn't come and have tea with me, which is nice. And Kathy takes me to all of the appointments, and it really is remarkable.

WSCHS: That's what family is for. You're lucky.

Branscomb: Kathy's mother died many years ago, and her father, I think, had died when she was in high school or something. So, we're Kathy's family. And, of course, they have Teddy. Isn't he a doll?

Rae: Oh, the best! And he loves you!

Branscomb: Oh, I know! He calls me up several times a day, and he'll never hang up before he says, "I love you very much, Grandma!"

Rae: Oh, he does!

Branscomb: It's so funny, you know. He'll start to say, to tell, something, and I'll say, "Now don't worry. You can say it because you know your grandmother was young once, too." We get along really well!

Well, I think that what I need to do is to think about what things might be in
WSCHS: Well, if you think about something and you want to do it, write it, that's great.
INTERVIEW ENDS.